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THE AFRICAN AMERICAN'S GUIDE TO HEALTHY LIVING

SUMMER 1994

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Smile

dental news & views

Toothy tidbit

Toothbrushing isn't a modern-day invention. In fact, early Egyptians were as concerned about their pearly whites as we are. According to the Academy of General Dentistry in Chicago, early toothbrushes—otherwise known as chew sticks—have been found in Egyptian tombs dating as far back as 3000 B.C. Far from our Day-Glo plastic models, these brushes were no more than twigs—with one end frayed for what must have been uncomfortable brushing. As for toothpaste, Cleopatra boasted her own personal concoction—a mouth-watering mixture of powdered pumice and strong wine vinegar. All of which should make the prospect of flossing a little bit easier to swallow, no?

Open wide: A new dental process may make you less uneasy about

Spray away decay

Even the most rational people suffer a fear of going to the dentist. But African Americans take “drill dread” one step farther, dodging the dentist in veritable droves. And our dental health has suffered as a result.

Thanks to a new technique, however, we need no longer swallow our fears—or considerable pain—when we open wide.

Kinetic cavity preparation system (KCP) is a new procedure that allows dentists to treat cavities without causing pain (i.e., no needle). During KCP, your dentist directs a high-speed stream of tiny particles at the part of the tooth that is

stained (indicating the beginnings of a cavity) and literally sprays away the decay—“much like a very precise miniature sandblaster would,” says Atlanta dentist Ronald Goldstein, D.D.S., author of *Change Your Smile: A Consumer's Guide to Cosmetic Dentistry* (Quintessence Publishing, 1988).

Another perk to the process: KCP allows dentists to remove stains on teeth so that they can detect whether decay has truly set in. If it has, the cavity can be filled. If not, the discoloration can be removed and the tooth can be treated with a sealant to prevent a cavity from developing. In other words, dentists using KCP will be able to prevent and detect cavities at a much earlier stage, so you won't suffer decay as you get older, says Goldstein. Put the bite on future cavities and ask your dentist about this new procedure.



ALLISON LEACH

Dry cleaning

Eating junk food and going to bed without brushing aren't the only ways to cause cavities. Many medications prescribed for other ailments—from the common cold to depression—can trigger tooth decay, too.

To be more accurate, it's not the medications themselves but rather what they do to your mouth that prompts the decay process. Antihistamines, tranquilizers, antidepressants and some antihypertensive medications can cause xerostomia, or dry mouth, which refers to a lack of saliva in the mouth. And because saliva contains antibacterial elements that protect teeth from cavities and other dental problems, a deficit is a problem.

Don't fret, however. "Cavities that accompany xerostomia are completely preventable," says William K. Bottomley, D.D.S., M.S., a professor at Howard University Dental School in Washington, D.C. "You shouldn't



get any cavities if you follow the proper regimen."

Bottomley recommends that you brush your teeth with a fluoride toothpaste and floss after every meal; try a fluoride rinse or gel to harden the surface of your teeth or an antibacterial rinse to fend off bacterial activity; resist snacking between meals (especially sugary snacks); and sip water every 10 minutes or so (and after every bite of food during meals). Cutting out caffeine, alcohol and cigarettes help, too.

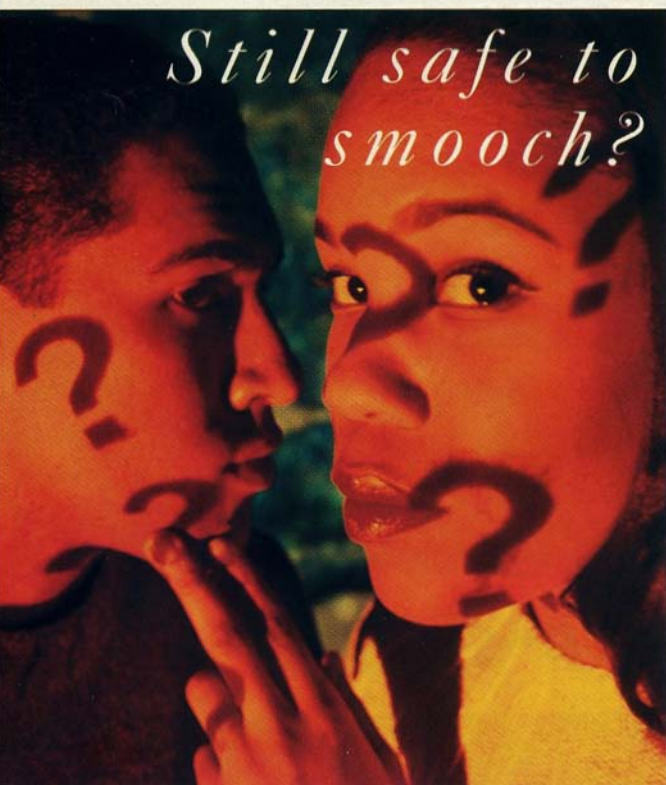
Boxed—and sent

Listen up, moms and dads. It may be time to pack up the juice boxes. According to a recent study published in the *Journal of Dentistry for Children*, high juice consumption is directly related to tooth erosion in children—especially those who suck frozen juice, which contains more acid than the liquid variety.

"Normally, tooth sensitivity isn't found among children," says L.Z.G. Touyz, M.Dent., a professor of periodontology at McGill University in Montreal. "But I'm seeing more young children with early tooth erosion, and it's usually because they consume a lot of juice."

You needn't force your kids to go cold turkey (except on the frozen varieties). But they should chill on the juice-box imbibing, slurping no more than a box a day. Try serving juice boxes with meals only, and make sure your kids don't suck on the straws and savor the juice over long periods of time. Of course, you should also encourage them to brush their teeth after drinking.

Still safe to smooch?



Spit isn't the only thing you swap when you give your main squeeze a smooch. New research indicates that kissing couples may also share gum disease, a condition that causes the gums, tissues and bones anchoring the teeth to deteriorate.

Finnish researchers at the University of Helsinki examined the mouths of 20 married couples and found that four of the twosomes harbored the same gum-disease-causing bacteria; these findings suggest that this bacteria may have been transmitted between partners. Fear not, though; there's no need to tell your sugar to kiss off just yet.

"All this study really proves is that the transmission of gum disease between partners is a possibility—and that more

research must be done," says Myron Bromberg, D.D.S., chairman of the Council on Dental Care of the Academy of General Dentistry in Chicago.

Nevertheless, the findings may help explain, why some periodontal patients become reinfected after having been treated successfully for gum disease. In fact, if further research confirms the kiss-'n'-catch connection, couples may need to be treated together in the future.

How can you safeguard your gums completely? You can't—but you *can* reduce your odds of developing gum disease by practicing good oral hygiene (brushing at least twice a day, flossing daily and visiting your dentist every six to nine months) and encouraging your partner to do the same.